



## News Analysis (01 Mar, 2021)

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### Pakistan-Sri Lanka and India

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#### Why in News

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Recently, **Pakistan's Prime Minister visited Sri Lanka**. It is the first Pakistani PM visit to Sri Lanka since 2016 and first visit by any head of government to Sri Lanka since the **Covid-19** pandemic began.

#### Key Points

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- **Sri Lanka-Pakistan Relationship (Background):**
  - **Trade:**

Sri Lanka and Pakistan have a **free trade agreement** dating back to 2005. **Pakistan is Sri Lanka's second largest trading partner** in South Asia **after India**.
  - **Culture:**

Over the last decade, **Pakistan** has also tried to work on a cultural connection with Sri Lanka by **highlighting its ancient Buddhist connections and sites**.
  - **Defence Cooperation:**
    - Defence ties are a **strong pillar** of the Sri Lanka-Pakistan bilateral relationship.
    - During the 1971 Indo-Pak war, Sri Lanka allowed refuelling of Pakistani Jets.
    - In its **Civil war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)** in 2009, Sri Lanka turned to Pakistan for arms and ammunition, as well as training for its fighter pilots, in the last stages of the war.
    - Recently, Sri Lanka participated in **Pakistan's multi-nation naval exercise Aman-21**.

- **About the Visit:**
  - **Defence Credit Line Facility:**  
Pakistan has offered a **USD 50 million new credit line to Sri Lanka** to boost cooperation in defence and security sectors.
  - **Enhancing Cultural Ties:**
    - Pakistan **will set up a centre for the study of Asian cultures and civilisation at Peradeniya University** in Kandy.
    - Sri Lanka also **named a sports institute in Colombo after Pakistan's PM**, highlighting the cricket connection between the two countries.
- **Significance of the Visit:**
  - **For Pakistan:**  
**Enhancing Trade Ties:**  
Pakistan invited Sri Lanka to “take advantage” of the **China Pakistan Economic Corridor** to enhance trade ties. In the past, Colombo had pitched for an economic corridor overland for access to countries beyond.
  - **For Sri Lanka:**
    - **Seeking Support in UNHRC:**
      - Recently, Sri Lanka has made an appeal to the member states of the **United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)** to reject the impending resolution on the island nation's human rights accountability and reconciliation.
      - Sri Lanka is facing a **new UNHRC resolution** calling on it to hold human rights abusers to account and deliver justice to victims of the **26-year civil war (1983-2009)** between the Sinhalese-dominated Sri Lankan government and the **Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)** insurgent group fighting for Tamilian minorities.
    - **Balancing Ties with India and Pakistan:**
      - It provided an opportunity to Sri Lanka to balance its ties with India and Pakistan.
      - Sri Lanka **cancelled Pakistan's PM address** to the Parliament over concerns that he would **raise the Kashmir issue**.
    - **Repairing Anti-Muslim Image:**
      - This visit may repair the damage of Sri Lanka's image in the Islamic world as it recently **denied burials of bodies of Muslims who have died of Covid-19**.
      - **Muslims**, who make up about **11% of Sri Lanka's population**, have had **tense relations with the Sinhala Buddhist majority** for much of the last decade, with riots shattering the uneasy calm every few years.

## Concerns For India

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- **Hamper Efforts of Isolating Pakistan:**
  - As Sri Lanka's closest neighbour with strong, all encompassing ties, India has not perceived Pakistan as a serious rival in Colombo so far.
  - However, this visit signalled that despite India's best efforts at "isolating" Pakistan, it has friends in the neighbourhood.
- **Increasing Closeness to China:**

Pakistan's PM visit soon after **Sri Lanka's abrupt withdrawal from a tripartite agreement** (along with Japan and India) for the development of the **East Container Terminal at Colombo port**, and the award of a **contract to a Chinese company** to set up a **hybrid renewable energy** in an island off Jaffna is a reason for concern for India.
- **Threatening India's Interests in Indian Ocean Region:**
  - Increasing convergence of interests between Sri Lanka, China, and Pakistan in the Indian Ocean region is a matter of concern.
  - Sri Lanka's role is central in accomplishment of India's strategic vision (**SAGAR**) for the Indian Ocean, and countering China's **String of Pearls** strategy.
  - **Pakistan's extension of the line of credit to Sri Lanka** comes close on the heels of **India extending USD 50 million line of credit to neighbouring Maldives** for strengthening navy capabilities and **USD 100 million to Mauritius** for shoring up coastal defences.
- **Connectivity:**
  - The Gwadar port is connected to China's Xinjiang province by the CPEC which in turn is a strand of the ambitious multi-billion dollar Belt and Road Initiative launched by China in 2013.
  - The latest invitation to Sri Lanka from Pakistan comes as **India is trying to get work restarted on Chabahar port in Iran** which New Delhi sees as a route to landlocked Central Asia and Afghanistan bypassing Pakistan.
- **Concerns over Radicalisation by Pakistan:**

Sporadically, the Indian security establishment has voiced concerns about Pakistan's role in the radicalisation of Muslims — especially in Eastern Sri Lanka.

## Way Forward

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- Sri Lanka has learnt to balance its ties with India and Pakistan expertly, signalling to both that it treats the two relationships separately. India too should not get threatened by Sri Lanka-Pakistan ties instead it should readjust alignments in its interests. **Reviving a trilateral maritime dialogue with Sri Lanka and the Maldives in 2020** is a positive step in that direction.
- India should also consider adding to the mix an old idea proposed first by former Prime Minister of Sri Lanka Ranil Wickremesinghe — **an overland economic corridor through India** that would provide Sri Lanka a land route to Central Asia and beyond.

**Source: IE**

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## Switzerland's Policy of Neutrality

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### Why in News

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Recently, Switzerland's Ambassador said that its traditional foreign **Policy of Neutrality (Swiss Neutrality)** has become **attractive again because of the changing political reality** in the world.



### Key Points

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- **Policy of Neutrality:**

- It is a foreign policy position wherein a **state intends to remain neutral in future wars**. A sovereign state that reserves the right to become belligerent if attacked by a party to the war is in a **condition of armed neutrality**.
- A permanently neutral power is a sovereign state which is bound by international treaty, or by its own declaration, to be **neutral towards the belligerents of all future wars**. An example of a permanently neutral power is Switzerland. Other being Ireland, Austria, etc.

The concept of neutrality in war is **narrowly defined and puts specific constraints on the neutral party** in return for the internationally recognized right to remain neutral.

- **International Day of Neutrality** is a United Nations recognized day held on **12<sup>th</sup> December** each year to raise public awareness of the value of neutrality in international relations.
  - National policies of neutrality are aimed at promoting the **use of preventive diplomacy**, which is a core function of the **United Nations**.
  - **The term "Preventive diplomacy"** refers to diplomatic action taken to prevent disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of conflicts when they occur.

- **Swiss Neutrality and its Evolution:**

- Switzerland is renowned for its neutrality, but this should not be confused with pacifism. The country **maintains an army**, including obligatory conscription for men, and did so throughout both World Wars.
- The last time Switzerland (Swiss) fought a military battle was **500 years ago**, against the **French** (the Swiss lost).
- In 1783, Switzerland was **acknowledged as a neutral state** in the **Treaty of Paris**.

The Treaty of Paris was signed in Paris by Great Britain and the United States of America and Canada on 3rd September, 1783, and it officially ended the **American Revolutionary War**.

- Switzerland maintained its impartial stance through **World War I (1914-18)**, when it mobilized its army and accepted refugees but also refused to take sides militarily.
- In 1920, meanwhile, the newly formed **League of Nations** officially recognized Swiss neutrality and established its headquarters in Geneva.
- A more significant challenge to Swiss neutrality came during **World War II**, when the country found itself encircled by the **Axis powers**. However even then Switzerland maintained its independence by promising retaliation in the event of an invasion.
- Since World War II, Switzerland has taken a more active role in international affairs by aiding humanitarian initiatives, but it remains fiercely neutral with regard to military affairs. It has never joined the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** or the **European Union**, and only joined the **United Nations** in 2002.
- In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Switzerland is again becoming a destination for dialogue on difficult issues.

Discussions on Syria, Libya and Yemen were held in Geneva.

- **Significance for India:**

- India's policy of **Non-alignment** and **Switzerland's traditional policy of neutrality** have led to a close understanding between the two countries.
- In 1948, a **Treaty of Friendship** was concluded between both the countries. Both believe in the spirit of **democracy and pluralism**.

## **Non-Aligned Movement**

- **About:**

It is a **forum of 120 developing world states** that are not formally aligned with or against any major power bloc.

- **Origin:**
  - The group was **started in Belgrade, Yugoslavia in 1961.**
  - It was created by Yugoslavia's President, Josip Broz Tito, **India's first PM, Jawaharlal Nehru**, Egypt's second President Gamal Abdel Nasser, Ghana's first president Kwame Nkrumah, and Indonesia's first President, Sukarno.
  - The most important antecedent to the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement was the **Bandung Conference of 1955.**
- **Objectives:**
  - It has sought to "**create an independent path in world politics that would not result in member States becoming pawns in the struggles between the major powers.**"
  - It identifies the right of independent judgment, the **struggle against imperialism and neo-colonialism**, and the use of moderation in relations with all big powers as the three basic elements that have influenced its approach.
  - At present, an additional goal is facilitating a **restructuring of the international economic order.**
- **Principles:**
  - Respect for **fundamental human rights** and of the objectives and principles of the Charter of the **United Nations.**
  - Respect for the **sovereignty and territorial integrity** of all countries.
  - Recognition of **equality among all races** and of **equality among all nations**, both large and small.
  - **Non-interference or non-intervention** into the internal affairs of another country.
  - Respect the **right of every nation** to defend itself, either individually or collectively, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations.
  - **Non-use of collective defence pacts** to benefit the specific interests of any of the great powers.
  - Refraining from acts or threats of aggression and use of force against the territorial integrity or **political independence** of any nation.
  - Settlement of all international disputes by peaceful means.
  - Promotion of **mutual interest and cooperation.**
  - Respect for justice and international obligations.

**Source: TH**

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## **Houthis Attacked Riyadh**

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### **Why in News**

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Recently, a **ballistic missile attack** by the **Houthis** on the Saudi capital **Riyadh** was destroyed by the **Saudi-led coalition** fighting Yemen's Iranian-aligned Houthi group.



## Key Points

- **Reasons for Recent Attack:**
  - **Taking Advantage:**
    - The Houthis are winning, they have made significant advances on the ground, especially in Jawf province along the Saudi border.
    - They are now poised to attack the city of Marib, the last stronghold of the Yemeni government in the north.
  - **Iran's Support:**
    - **Iran is involved in Houthi decision making.** Tehran (capital of Iran) undoubtedly wants the Saudi kingdom to remain embroiled in the Yemeni chaos.
    - **Saudi Arabia and Iran have been engaged in proxy wars** with each other for 40 years, since the **Iranian revolution**. Yemen is now among the victims of that conflict.



- **Background:**

- **Yemen Conflict:**

- Since 2014, Yemen has been facing a **multi-sided conflict** involving local, regional, and international actors.
    - The **Houthis, a group of Zaidi Shia Muslims** who ruled a kingdom there for nearly 1,000 years, used widespread anger against President Hadi's decision to postpone long-awaited elections and his stalled negotiations over a new constitution.
    - They marched from their stronghold of Saada province to the capital Sanaa and surrounded the presidential palace, placing **Hadi under house arrest**.

- **Saudi Arabia's Intervention:**

- A military coalition led by **Saudi Arabia intervened in Yemen in March 2015**, at Hadi's request, after the Houthis continued to sweep the south and threatened to conquer the last government stronghold of Aden, prompting **one of the world's worst humanitarian crises** ever.

- **Ceasefire:**

- Yemen Houthi rebels and Saudi Arabia-backed forces loyal to the President of Yemen agreed to a **United Nations-mediated ceasefire agreement in 2018**.

- **Resurgence of Houthi Attacks:**

- In 2019, the Yemen's Shia Houthi rebels, violating the ceasefire, attacked **Aramco crude oil production in Saudi Arabia**.

- **Concerns:**

- Yemen is strategically important because it sits on a strait linking the **Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden**, through which much of the **world's oil** shipments pass.
  - It also worries the West because of the **threat of attacks** - such as from **al-Qaeda** or **IS affiliates**-emanating from the country as it becomes more unstable.
  - The Houthis have escalated **cross-border attacks** on the kingdom even after the **United States delisted the rebels as terrorists** and stepped up efforts to de-escalate the six-year conflict.
  - The conflict is also seen as part of a **regional power struggle** between **Shia-ruled Iran** and **Sunni-ruled Saudi Arabia**.

- **India's Interest:**

- For India, it is a challenge which cannot be washed away taking into consideration the oil security and 8 million expats living in the region with more than **USD 80 billion of incoming remittance** annually.

- **Indian Initiatives:**
  - **Operation Rahat:**

India launched a massive air and sea operation to evacuate over 4000 Indian nationals from Yemen in April 2015.
  - **Humanitarian Assistance:**
    - India has provided **food and medical aid to Yemen** in the past and thousands of **Yemeni nationals have availed of medical treatment in India** over the past few years.
    - India also continues to facilitate education of a large number of Yemeni nationals in various Indian institutions.

**Source:TH**

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## **India Emerged Out of Technical Recession**

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### **Why in News**

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The Indian economy has emerged out of **technical recession** as it **grew at 0.4% in the third (October-December) quarter of 2020-21** with improvement in manufacturing, construction and agriculture.

- The **Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** had contracted by 24.4% and 7.3% in the April-June and July-September quarters, respectively, marking a technical recession in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- A **technical recession** is when a country **faces a continuous decline** for two consecutive quarters in the GDP.

### **Key Points**

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- **Growth Projections:**
  - For the **full fiscal year (2020-21)**, the **National Statistical Office (NSO)** has projected a **contraction of 8%**, higher than the forecasts of the **Economic Survey** (7.7%) and the **Reserve Bank of India** (7.5%).
  - The **real GDP growth estimate for the third quarter (2020-21) is at 0.4%**. In the **corresponding quarter last year**, the economy **had grown 3.3%**.
  - For the April-June quarter (Q1) and July-September (Q2), the contraction numbers were revised from 23.9% to 24.4% and 7.5% to 7.3%, respectively.

- **Growth Across Major Sectors:**

- **Industries and Services Sector:**

- With improved performance of manufacturing, electricity and construction, **industry recorded a growth rate of 2.6% in the third quarter** against the contraction in the first two.
- However, **services**, with the largest share in GDP at 57%, **still remained in the contraction zone with a 0.9%** fall year-on-year.
  - **Financial, real estate and professional services grew 6.6% as against 9.5% contraction** in the previous quarter and 5.5% growth in the corresponding period last year.
  - **Mining, trade, hotels, transport, communication and broadcasting services and public administration services continued to stay in the negative territory** in the third quarter registering a contraction of 5.9 %, 7.7%, and 1.5%, respectively.

- **Cores Sector Output:**

- India's eight core sectors **recorded a meagre 0.1% rise in output** in January 2021, propped up by a 5.1% rise in electricity, 2.7% growth in fertilizers and 2.6% growth in steel production, even as the other five sectors contracted.
- Coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, and cement recorded negative growth in January.
- The **eight core industries constitute 40.27% of the Index of Industrial Production**.

- **Agriculture:**

Growth in agriculture **jumped 3.9% in October-December** compared with 3% growth in July-September and 3.4% growth during the corresponding quarter last year.

- **Reasons:**

- **New Investment:**

- The positive momentum seen in investment demand (**Gross Fixed Capital Formation - GFCF**) as it **grew by 2.6%** in the third quarter after being in doldrums for several quarters now.

**GFCF:** It is essentially net investment. It is a component of the Expenditure method of calculating GDP.

- This is the result of unrelenting efforts of the government to go all-out to revive investments under the ambit of the various measures which formed a part of the **Atma Nirbhar Bharat** package.
- Going forward, the growth stimuli available from the **Union Budget 2021-22** and the additional measures including the **Production-Linked Incentive (PLI)** will lead to a strong growth path over the recovery horizon.

- **Increase in Centre's Capital Expenditure:**

The resurgence of **Government Final Consumption Expenditure (GFCE)** in Q3 and Centre's capital expenditure increased year-on-year by 129% in October, 249% in November and 62% in December.

**GFCE** is an aggregate transaction amount on a country's national income accounts representing government expenditure on goods and services that are used for the direct satisfaction of individual needs (individual consumption) or collective needs of members of the community.

- **V-shaped recovery:**

The Q3 GDP numbers showed the success of the government's initial policy of "**lives over livelihood**". "The **sharp V-shaped recovery** has been driven by rebounds in both **Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE)** and **Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF)** as a combination of astute handling of the lockdown and a calibrated fiscal stimulus.

**PFCE:** It is defined as the expenditure incurred by the resident households and non-profit institutions serving households (NPISH) on final consumption of goods and services, whether made within or outside the economic territory.

- **Other Economic Indicators:**

- **Domestic Consumption:** Disaggregated data show that **domestic consumption continued to contract**, at 58.6% of GDP in Q3, as against 60.2% during the corresponding period of last fiscal.
- **Government Spending:** Government spending, as reflected by the GFCE, dipped a tad to 9.8% of GDP in Q3 from 10% during Q2.
- **GVA Estimates:** The growth rate in terms of gross value added (GVA) — which is **GDP minus net product taxes**, and reflects growth in supply — is seen **contracting 6.5% in 2020-21** as against earlier estimates of 7.2% and 3.9% in the previous year.
- **GDP in Nominal Terms:** It **factors in inflation**, and is estimated at (-) 3.8% in 2020-21.

**Source:TH**

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## **National Science Day 2021**

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### **Why in News**

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National Science Day (NSD) is celebrated every year on 28th February to commemorate the discovery of the '**Raman Effect**' by Sir Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman, for which he was awarded the **Nobel Prize** in 1930. The first NSD was celebrated in 1987.

### **Key Points**

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- **Basic Objective:** To propagate the message of the importance of science and its application among the people.
- **2021 Theme:** 'Future of STI (Science, Technology and Innovations): Impacts on Education, Skills, and Work'.
- **Nodal Agency to Support Celebration:** **National Council for Science & Technology Communication (NCSTC)** of Ministry of Science and Technology.
- **Awards Conferred:**
  - National S&T Communication Awards, **Augmenting Writing Skills for Articulating Research (AWSAR) awards**, and **SERB Women Excellence Awards** and Rajendra Prabhu Memorial Appreciation Shield for outstanding work in science media and journalism.
  - The first-ever **National S&T Databases on S&T Awards** in India and Indian origin Academicians abroad, was released.

- **Augmenting Writing Skills for Articulating Research (AWSAR):**
  - AWSAR is an initiative that aims to disseminate Indian research stories among the masses in an easy to understand and interesting format.
  - **Objectives:**
    - To encourage youth pursuing higher studies to submit at least one story/article based on their research work.
    - Foster, strengthen and create scientific temper through popular science writing and creating a culture of science communication/popularisation among the scholars.
    - Recognize the initiative and output of researchers on the specific aspects of natural, physical, mathematical and information sciences, applied science, technology, engineering, and multi-disciplinary science.
    - Conduct training Workshops for Early Career Researchers (PhD Scholars and PDFs) in popular science writing.
- **Some Recent Developments:**
  - **National Research Foundation (NRF):** It is to be set-up as an autonomous body envisaged under the **New Education Policy (NEP) 2020**.  
It will look after funding, mentoring, and building 'quality of research' in India. The NRF aims to fund researchers working across streams in India.
  - **Draft National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP 2020)**.

## **Raman Effect**

- Raman is the inelastic scattering of a photon by molecules which are excited to higher vibrational or rotational energy levels. It is also called **Raman scattering**.
  - In simpler words, it is a **change in the wavelength of light** that occurs when a light beam is deflected by molecules.
  - When a beam of light traverses a dust-free, transparent sample of a chemical compound, a small fraction of the light emerges in directions other than that of the incident (incoming) beam.
  - Most of this scattered light is of unchanged wavelength. A small part, however, has wavelengths different from that of the incident light and its presence is a result of the Raman Effect.
- The Raman effect forms the **basis for Raman spectroscopy** which is used by chemists and physicists to gain information about materials.  
Spectroscopy is the study of the interaction between matter and electromagnetic radiation.

**Source:IE**

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**Morarji Desai**

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## Why in News

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Recently, the **125<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Morarji Desai** was observed (29<sup>th</sup> February 2021).

He was the 4<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister (1977-79) and the first non-Congress Prime Minister of India.

## Key Points

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- **Early Life:**
  - Shri Morarji Desai was born on 29<sup>th</sup> February, 1896 in Bhadeli village, now in the Bulsar district of Gujarat.
  - After graduating in 1918 from the Wilson Civil Service in Bombay, he served as a Deputy Collector for twelve years.
- **Contribution in Freedom Struggle:**
  - **Joined Congress:**
    - In 1930, when India was in the midst of the **Civil Disobedience Movement** launched by Mahatma Gandhi, Shri Desai, having lost his confidence in the British sense of justice, **decided to resign from Government service and to plunge into the struggle.**
    - Shri Desai was **imprisoned thrice** during the freedom struggle. He became a Member of the All India Congress Committee in 1931 and was Secretary of the Gujarat Pradesh Congress Committee until 1937.
  - **Participation In Individual Satyagraha:**

He was **detained in the individual Satyagraha** launched by Mahatma Gandhi, released in October, 1941 and detained again in August, 1942 at the time of the **Quit India Movement**.

- **Political Career:**

- In 1952, he became the **Chief Minister of Bombay**.
- He joined the **Union Cabinet as Minister for Commerce and Industry** in November, 1956. Later, he took the Finance portfolio in March, 1958.
- In 1963, he resigned from the **Union Cabinet under the Kamraj Plan**. **Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri**, who succeeded Pt. Nehru, as Prime Minister, **persuaded him to become Chairman of the Administrative Reforms Commission** for restructuring the administrative system.

**According to Kamaraj Plan**, it was proposed that all senior Congress leaders should resign from their posts and devote all their energy to the revitalization of the Congress.

- Desai was **arrested and detained on 26<sup>th</sup> June, 1975, when Emergency was declared**. He went on an indefinite hunger strike to support the **Nav Nirman movement of Gujarat**.

**Nav Nirman Andolan** was a socio-political movement in 1974 in Gujarat by students and middle-class people against economic crisis and corruption in public life.

- He was later unanimously elected as Leader of the Janata Party in Parliament and was sworn in as the **Prime Minister of India on 24<sup>th</sup> March, 1977**.

- **His Ideology:**

- **Against Inequality:** According to him, unless the poor and the under privileged living in villages and towns enjoy a decent standard of life, the talk of socialism will not have much meaning. Shri Desai gave concrete expression to his anxiety by enacting progressive legislation to ameliorate the hardships of peasants and tenants.
- **Supported Austerity:** Shri Desai translated into action what he had professed in matters of economic planning and fiscal administration. In order to meet the needs of defense and development, he raised large revenues, reduced wasteful expenditure and promoted austerity in Government expenditure on administration. He kept **deficit financing** very low by enforcing financial discipline. He brought curbs on extravagant living of the privileged section of society.
- **Rule of Law:** As Prime Minister, Shri Desai was keen that the people of India must be helped to become fearless to an extent where even if the highest in the land commits a wrong, the humblest should be able to point it out to him. “No one, not even the Prime Minister”, he was repeatedly said, should be above the law of the land”.
- **Strict Disciplinarian:** For him, truth was an article of faith and not an expediency. He seldom allowed his principles to be subordinated to the exigencies of the situation.

**Source:IE**

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# Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav 2021

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## Why in News

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The third and final leg of 11<sup>th</sup> edition of the Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav 2021 took place at Murshidabad, West Bengal.

Various colourful performances were given by the local artists, including ‘**Baul Gaan**’, ‘**Alkup Gaan**’, ‘**Leto gaan**’, ‘**Jhumuriya**’ and **Ranpa folk dances**.

## Key Points

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- Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav is the flagship festival of the **Ministry of Culture**.
- It has been organized since 2015 with the active participation of **Seven Zonal Culture Centres**.
- It was started with an intention to exhibit the rich cultural heritage of the country in all its rich and varied dimensions namely, Handicrafts, Cuisine, Painting, Sculpture and Performing Arts- Folk, Tribal, Classical and Contemporary- all at one place.
- **Significance:**
  - It has been playing a pivotal role **to take the vibrant culture of India out to the masses** instead of confining it to auditoria and galleries.
  - It has been instrumental in **showcasing folk and tribal art**, dance, music, cuisines & culture of one state in other states reinforcing the cherished goal of “**Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat**”.
  - It also provides **an effective platform to the artists and artisans** to support their livelihood.
  - It **reconnects the people (especially the youth) with their indigenous culture**, its multifaceted nature, magnificence, and historical importance in the context of ‘**India as a Nation**’ over the millennia.
- Till date, Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsavs have been held at various places such as Delhi, Varanasi, Bengaluru, Tawang, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tehri and Madhya Pradesh.

## Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat

- It was launched in 2015 to **promote engagement amongst the people** of different States/UTs so as to enhance mutual understanding and bonding between people of diverse cultures, thereby securing stronger unity and integrity of India.
- It is an initiative of the **Ministry of Education**.

- The broad objectives of the initiative are as follows:
  - To **CELEBRATE** the Unity in Diversity of our nation and to maintain and strengthen the fabric of traditionally existing emotional bonds between the people,
  - To **PROMOTE** the spirit of national integration through a deep and structured engagement between all Indian states and Union Territories through a year-long planned engagement between states,
  - To **SHOWCASE** the rich heritage and culture, customs and traditions of different states for enabling people to understand and appreciate the diversity that is India, thus fostering a sense of common identity,
  - To **ESTABLISH** long-term engagements, and
  - To **CREATE** an environment which promotes learning between states by sharing best practices and experiences.
- **Every State and UT in the country would be paired with another State/UT for a time period**, during which they would carry out a structured engagement with one another in the spheres of language, literature, cuisine, festivals, cultural events, tourism etc

### **Zonal Cultural Centres**

- The centres aim to strengthen the ancient roots of Indian Culture and evolve and enrich composite National Culture.
- There are seven Zonal Cultural Centres (ZCC) in India.
  - Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre Kolkata, North Central Zone Cultural Centre Allahabad, North east Zone Cultural centre Dimapur, North Zone Cultural centre Patiala, South Central Zone Cultural Centre Nagpur, South Zone Cultural Centre Thanjavur, West Zone Cultural Centre Udaipur
- These ZCCs organize various cultural activities and programmes all over the country on a regular basis.
- Other schemes of ZCCs - Award to Young Talented Artists, Guru Shishya Parampara, Theatre Rejuvenation, Shilpgram, Octave and National Cultural Exchange Programme (NCEP).

**Source:PIB**

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## **Technical Education Quality Improvement Programme**

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### **Why in News**

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Government is planning to replace the **Technical Education Quality Improvement Programme (TEQIP)** with a new programme **MERITE Project**.

### **Key Points**

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- **About the Technical Education Quality Improvement Programme:**
    - It was started in 2002 by the Ministry of Human Resources and Development with the assistance of the **World Bank** and is being implemented in a phased manner.
    - It aims **to upscale the quality of technical education** and enhance capacities of institutions.
    - The **Technical Education Quality Improvement Programme III (TEQIP-III) was started in 2017** and will be completed by 2021.
      - It aims **to develop technical education** as a key component for improving the quality of Engineering Education.
      - The Objective is to **improve quality and equity in engineering** institutions in focus states such as in low income states.
  - **About MERITE Project:**
    - The project has an objective to improve technical education like the TEQIP.
    - However, the MERITE Project is still in the conceptual stage and has not yet received Cabinet approval.

### **Other Initiative to Improve Technical Education**

- **Margarashan and Margadarshak** (AICTE).
- **Institutions of Eminence (IoE) scheme.**
- Technical Education in Mother Tongue has been proposed by the **National Education Policy (NEP).**
  - To achieve the objective that students may pursue the professional courses such as medicine, engineering, law, etc in their mother tongue.
  - It suggests teaching in regional language till class 8 and enabling teaching the curriculum in a language which a student is comfortable in.
- **Uchhatar Avishkar Yojana (UAY) schemes.**

**Source: TH**

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## **Suryakiran Aerobatic Team**

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### **Why in News**

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The **Suryakiran Aerobatic Team (SKAT)** and **Sarang helicopter display team** along with the **Light Combat Aircraft (LCA)** will **perform at an air show at Galle Face in Colombo** from 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> March 2021 as part the **70<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the Sri Lankan Air Force (SLAF).**

This will be the first performance for the SKAT team outside India since it was resurrected in 2015 with Hawk Advanced Jet Trainers (AJT). Earlier, the SKAT team toured Sri Lanka during the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of SLAF in 2001.

## Key Points

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- **About the Suryakiran Aerobatic Team:**

- **Establishment:**

- The team was formed in 1996 with **Kiran Mk-II aircraft** and had enthralled spectators across the country till 2011.
- It was **revived in 2015** with Hawk trainers initially with four aircraft and grew to the nine aircraft formation.

- **Features:**

- The SKAT team, **also known as 52 Squadron or The Sharks**, is based in Bidar (Karnataka).
- Since its inception, the SKAT team has carried out over 600 displays all around the country, it has also **represented India across southeast Asia including China**.
- **1971 Commemorations:**

Marking the golden jubilee year of the **1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh**, the SKAT team has been flying different formations over landmarks across the country starting from Kanyakumari in the south.

- **Sarang Helicopter Display Team:**

- The Sarang team has **evolved from the ALH Evaluation Flight (AEF) which was formed in 2003** at Bangalore to evaluate the indigenous helicopter prior to its induction into operational service.
- The Indian Air Force aerobatic team Sarang (Peacock) comprises **four Indian built Dhruv helicopters** (an Advanced Light Helicopter - ALH, built by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, Bangalore).

**Source:TH**

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